

Members of the Appropriations Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, Senator Cathy Osten, Senator Paul Formica, and Representative Toni Walker, Tri-Chairs:

Subject: Restoration of Funding for the Connecticut Humanities Council, Inc., within the budget of the Department of Economic & Community Development

Submitted by: Dr. Jamie H. Eves, Executive Director, Windham Textile and History Museum; Adjunct Instructor, Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut

My name is Jamie Eves. I live in Windham/Willimantic, CT. I am the Executive Director of the Windham Textile and History Museum. I am also Adjunct Instructor of History at Eastern Connecticut State University and the University of Connecticut. I have a Ph.D. in History from UConn, and have worked as a practicing historian and educator for more than thirty years.

I strongly urge the Legislature restore the \$1.73 million appropriation for Connecticut Humanities, for the following reasons:

(1) Connecticut should be doing more to promote its history, not less. A shared sense of history promotes a shared sense of community. It promotes pride in our accomplishments and respect for each other. A number of years ago, the noted anthropologist Eric R. Wolf wrote the now classic *Europe and the People without History*, in which he showed that, because the histories of non-Western, colonial peoples often went either unrecorded or unacknowledged, there had developed the false notion that those people didn't have any history, that they had never done anything important, and that they were, essentially, uncivilized. Here in Connecticut, we are surrounded by bigger neighbors – New York, Massachusetts, and even the United States as a whole – that pump millions of dollars and untold hours of scholarship, into promoting their histories. The result is a popular prejudice that big states, big cities, and national capitals have history, accomplishments, and civilization, but that small states, small cities, towns, and villages are places without history. This notion, I find, is common among people in Connecticut, including the students in my classrooms, who all too often assume that if it didn't happen in Boston, New York, or Washington, that either it wasn't important, or maybe didn't happen at all. Connecticut as a whole needs a sense of its own history, so that we know who we are, what we have in common with each other, and what makes us unique. An illustration: A group of third graders who attended a school in one of the less affluent neighborhoods in Windham visited the Windham Textile and History Museum. They were standing in a reproduction of the kitchen of a mill worker family tenement, listening to a docent explain daily life, when one little girl – whose family lived in one of the surviving tenements – looked about with wonder and

declared, “This is MY house!” Her classmates drew closer, understanding in the way that eight-year-olds can, that she, too lived in a “historic house” – that her house, too, had history.

(2) Connecticut Humanities is the best vehicle for promoting history in Connecticut, because of its long history of providing grants and resources to small museums and organizations as well as large, and smaller and/or less affluent communities as well as the larger and more powerful. Allow me to use my own organization as an example. A few years ago, the Windham Textile and History Museum was struggling to stay open. We had many committed volunteers, but few resources. We had an important story to tell – the history of the textile industry, mill towns, and immigration in Connecticut – but difficulty reaching a wide audience. When Connecticut Humanities initiated its first-in-the-nation STEPS program to provide professional training to small museums and history organizations, we applied. The two-year program was rigorous, but we persisted. STEPS not only made us a more professional museum, it also let others in Connecticut know that we were a professional museum. As a result, we have seen a large increase in the number of school tours, summer visitors, and attendance at our history programs. Although some of the increase has come locally, much of it consists of visitors and classes from outside of Windham/Willimantic. We have done things that a few years ago, we would not have thought possible. Third graders from small former mill towns in eastern Connecticut have visited us on joint tours and programs with third graders from Hartford and New London – and discovered that they have more in common than they had ever thought possible.

I could go on, but my time is brief, and I trust that others will make the many other points in favor of restoring funding. I strongly urge restoring funding for Connecticut Humanities, and thank you for listening to this old history teacher.